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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000100

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SUBJECT: GAZA HUMANITARIAN UPDATE, JANUARY 13, 1700 HRS

REF: TEL AVIV 0080

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Luis G. Moreno; reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (SBU) As of 1700 local on January 13, 102 truckloads of humanitarian supplies, including 2 tankers of industrial diesel, were transferred into the Gaza Strip via Kerem Shalom. The Nahal Oz fuel terminal was closed today because of nearby military operations. The Karni crossing, open yesterday and planned to be open today, was closed because the IDF discovered a Hamas tunnel in the area; COGAT said that they hope to be able to re-open Karni January 14. Erez was open for humanitarian evacuations, but, according to COGAT (Uri Singer), the PA Ministry of Health in Ramallah has discouraged Gazans from seeking medical treatment in Israel, so no medical cases were evacuated today. (Note: Singer told EconOff that this was a continuation of PA policy he had seen prior to Operation Cast Lead. End Note). No fuel was picked up today from the Gazan side of Nahal Oz, because coordination and escort of fuel convoys is currently a low priority for international organizations and tightening of the security noose around Gaza City makes it difficult for private truckers to get to the crossing.

¶2. (SBU) Infrastructure repair situation is getting desperate, especially at the Beit Lahiya sewage lagoon and Coastal Water Authority potable water sites. GOI claims it wants the ICRC to escort repair crews, but that the ICRC gives such duty low priority given the worsening security situation. ICRC says it has not received sufficient security guarantees from the GOI to permit repair crew escort. The IDF has offered to escort Gazan repair crews, but Gazan facility operators have said they would prefer international escort. Embassy is exploring with the GOI whether using IDF engineering teams is feasible/desirable given the urgency of the situation at Beit Lahiya.

¶3. (C) ICRC President's Visit: ICRC President Kellenberger and his party of ten crossed into and out of Gaza via Erez without incident, though there were a couple of close calls. Meeting with local staff after the Gaza visit, the ICRC decided it could not support the evacuation of 850 foreign nationals from Gaza, planned for later this week, because the situation is too unsafe. The ICRC also said it is strongly opposed to an IDF field hospital in Gaza, which would provide an alternative should existing hospitals in Gaza be damaged or destroyed.

¶4. (S/NF) Expanding Humanitarian Throughput: Embassy and USAID have been working with the GOI to increase humanitarian cargo into Gaza to at least 200 truckloads per day, roughly double the amount currently entering through Kerem Shalom. Our proposal to provide lighting to the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing was rebuffed due to fears that this would make it easier for Hamas mortar and rocket teams to target the crossing. DAO assesses that the Sufa crossing, which we had proposed as a workable addition to Kerem Shalom,

is being used by the IDF as a staging area for troop movements into southern Gaza. Apart from GOI intentions to open Karni and willingness to run up to 25 trucks a day through Erez, all other prospects for expanding humanitarian input will take weeks, if not months, to get off the ground.

¶ 15. (C/NF) UN SYG Visit: PolOff spoke with Jonathan Lincoln at UNSCO on UN SYG Ban Ki Moon's visit to the region. Ban will not visit Gaza. The SYG is looking at a regional trip including Egypt, Israel, PA, Lebanon, Syria (planned a while ago as only Lebanon/Syria trip). In Israel, he is tentatively set to meet PM Olmert, MOD Barak, MFA Livni (w/press conference), President Peres, and Likud leader Netanyahu. He also plans to meet with Palestinian Authority PM Fayyad, and with Abu Mazen (w/press conference). Ban's message will be: immediate ceasefire, durable ceasefire, and meeting recovery/rebuilding needs on day after. UNSCO believes Israel does not like first point, but is ready for it, and will like second and perhaps even third point. UN believes Israel can accept certain elements of UNSCR 1860 and Ban will try to build on that. Ban will also emphasize the situation for civilians on BOTH sides and will not press on any of the incidents of attacks on UN people and assets. Ban will be accompanied by Lynn Pascoe, Terje Roed-Larsen, Robert Serry, Michael Williams, Lisa Buttenheim, and Kim Won-soo (Deputy Chief of Staff).

¶ 16. (SBU) War Profiteering: Israeli media report GOI Customs seized a private sector shipment of flour bound for Gaza. The flour had been donated for use in the West Bank, was sold by a Palestinian businessman to an Israeli, who in turn sold it to a Gazan businessman. GOI Customs informed EconOff that

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it was working directly with its PA counterparts to bring all parties to justice.

¶ 17. (SBU) Miscellany: Israeli media report Syria is sending 80 tons of foodstuffs to Gaza via Jordan. Press also reports only seven rocket attacks on southern Israel thus far today, the lowest number since Operation Cast Lead began. No casualties were reported.

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